

RESOLUTIONS

OF

THE COUNCIL OF ROCHESTER, N. Y.,

ASKING

Appropriations for the fortifying, &c. of that port.

FEBRUARY 24, 1846.

Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

CITY OF ROCHESTER, N. Y.,

In Common Council, Feb. 10, 1846.

Present, the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen Hubbell, Van Slyck, Jones, Wright, Traver, Kempshall, Babcock, Cochrane, Newell, Ward, Hildreth, Hanford, Scrantom, Briggs, Whitney and Fisk.

The joint committee of the common council and citizens appointed to consider what measures should be taken in respect to the fortification of the port of Rochester, submitted the following memorial; which being read, on motion of Alderman Kempshall, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the said memorial be adopted; and that the same be signed by the mayor and clerk of the board, and the corporate seal of the city be affixed thereto; and that his honor the mayor be requested to forward the same immediately to the Hon. Elias B. Holmes, member of Congress from this district, to be presented by him to Congress; and that he be requested to give his best exertions to further the objects of the memorial.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States.

The memorial of the Mayor and Common Council of the city of Rochester respectfully sheweth—

That as the guardians of the interests of the large and flourishing city whose local interests are committed to their charge, your memorialists feel constrained, by their sense of duty to themselves, their constituents, and their country, to call the attention of the legislature of the Union to the defenceless state of the harbor within their municipal jurisdiction.

The port of Rochester, the most important harbor on the southern shore of lake Ontario, the most easy of access for all vessels navigating the lake in all weather and in all states of the wind, is utterly undefended by any artificial works or military fortifications. The general government, while it has fortified almost every other harbor and village in this State on the shore of lake Ontario, has hitherto entirely overlooked the Genesee harbor and the city of Rochester.

Ritchie & Heiss, printers.

While your memorialists, in common with their fellow-citizens, fervently hope that their country may long enjoy the blessings of peace, and sincerely trust that the small black cloud which seems at present to hover over our horizon may speedily be dispersed, yet they are not unconscious that many elements of controversy unhappily exist between this country and Great Britain, which may sooner or later produce that terrible calamity, an appeal to arms.

Admonished by the fact, and believing with the father of our country, that it is the truest policy "in peace to prepare for war;" and that this policy is best calculated to insure peace, while it serves to avert much of the danger, the injury and the horrors of war—they beg leave to present for the consideration of Congress a few facts, which seem to them adapted to produce in the minds of others the same conviction which your memorialists themselves strongly feel,—that the public interest imperatively requires the immediate commencement and speedy completion of defensive works at or adjacent to the mouth of the river Genesee. In the first place, there is no harbor belonging to this country upon the shore of lake Ontario, so large, so safe, so secure, so commodious for a naval force for offensive or defensive measures in time of war. Indeed, it is the only harbor at all accessible to a fleet in the case of a storm on this side of the lake, from Oswego to Lewiston, and there is no port on the whole lake to which a defeated or inferior force could flee and be so secure and so perfectly protected by fortifications on the shore, from the attack of a superior naval force. From the mouth of the river, distant about seven miles from the heart of this city, to the head of navigation, a distance of about four miles, the river is of a uniform depth of about twenty-five feet, of the width of about 25 rods, on both shores of which are high and precipitous banks for nearly the whole distance. From the head of steamboat navigation to the centre of this city have been constructed expensive McAdam roads on both sides of the river, affording at all times an easy and speedy communication between the harbor and the city. The curves in the river are such that vessels a short distance above its mouth would be entirely protected by the elevated banks from all attacks from vessels on the lake. Such, however, is the narrowness of the channel, that without the protection and aid of a fortification at the mouth of the river, a large naval force within the harbor might easily be blockaded by one much inferior upon the lake. But aside from considerations relating chiefly to general naval operations in time of war upon lake Ontario, and to the military enterprises which might naturally be adventured upon from this harbor, purposes of defence for our city and the country adjacent render military fortifications at the mouth of the Genesee otherwise a matter of great local and general importance. The city of Rochester possesses upwards of 25,000 inhabitants—the county of Monroe upwards of 70,000. Being in the centre of the finest agricultural section in this State, if not in the whole country, and being the greatest market for the purchase and manufacture of wheat in America, and from its great water power destined to be in other respects one of the greatest manufacturing towns in this country, it naturally presents to an enemy the strongest inducements for its conquest, and for the same reason that it presents to our government the strongest motives for its defence and protection. But beside the great inducement to its attack, which it presents from affording to so great an extent the sinews of war in the great quantity of provisions constantly accumulating here, Rochester is a point where an enemy could

do more extensive injury to the country, in the opinion of your memorialists, than at any other point in this whole State, except the city of New York. The Genesee river passes through the centre of the city—the great Erie canal also passes through the city, crossing the Genesee river by an aqueduct of cut stone, which has cost this State upwards of half a million of dollars. The great line of railroads passing through this section of the State also crosses the river on a bridge; and besides this, there are four other bridges across the river, built at great expense. The line of the electric telegraph, communicating between New York and Buffalo, will also pass through our city.

From these facts it will readily be seen that if an enemy were in possession of our city, and should destroy the aqueduct of the Erie canal, and demolish our bridges, mills, and manufactories, incalculable injury would be done not only to our own citizens, but to the country at large, more disastrously affecting the operations of the general government in carrying on a war upon this frontier, in the opinion of your memorialists, than any other injury that could possibly be done at any other point or place, or in any other mode, by a hostile power.

While your memorialists do not complain that millions have been expended by the general government on the Atlantic coast, in fortifying almost every place of sufficient importance to invite attack, they respectfully submit that instead of there being more, there is far less reason for constructing military defences at many points on the Atlantic than there is on this lake frontier. An attack by sea by a large force from any foreign port or country will naturally be attended with much more difficulty and peril than an attack by a land and naval force from Canada upon any point on this whole line of lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence, which, from its peculiarly exposed condition, must naturally be expected to meet and suffer the first and chief calamities and ravages of war. The people of Rochester, in the opinion of your memorialists, have very just occasion for apprehension in the case of a sudden declaration of war by Great Britain on this country, and particularly so when they perceive, as is now the case, the opposing shore of lake Ontario bristling with active military preparations; when they consider that the British government has been for years, and particularly ever since the late Canadian rebellion, strengthening the defences of that country, and accumulating at the most important points in that country military stores; and when they consider, also, that by the possession of the lower St. Lawrence, and by the construction of locks and canals around all the rapids of that noble river, that government has the power to send from the St. Lawrence, on lake Ontario, the largest class of steamers and propellers, and to concentrate with the facility and rapidity which the power of steam can give to nautical operations, at any point upon the lake, a large naval force capable, within a few hours' sail, of landing upon our shores a regular army of disciplined soldiers which Great Britain keeps constantly in Canada, as large, or nearly so, as the whole standing army of this country. While Rochester is thus so much exposed to attack, and presents so splendid a prize to an enemy, your memorialists regret to say that she possesses but small means of effectual resistance. While we are confident that the spirit and courage of our citizens are such that no means of defence in our power in case of an invasion would be left untried, we are obliged to declare that such means, aside from the power of our strong arms and the might of will, is very trifling. We have no artillery, no arsenal,

no munitions of war, no arms except a few old and rusty and generally nearly worthless muskets, and a few rifles in the hands of the common militia. The militia system, too, in this part of the State, has so fallen into disrepute that scarcely any organization exists—certainly none upon which, on the occasion of a sudden invasion, the least reliance can be placed. In this city we have, it is true, several uniform military companies, well disciplined, fully armed, and handsomely equipped, of which our city is justly proud; but they have never seen war, and their number in the aggregate is too small to be of much practical use against an invading force of such size as would naturally be sent against us. Your memorialists further respectfully submit, that in their opinion there is no point on this northern frontier so admirably adapted for a military and naval depot as Rochester. Situated about midway on the shore of lake Ontario, with a port large, commodious, and secure and easily defended, she possesses, by means of the Erie canal and railroads in operation in this section of the State, and the magnetic telegraph soon to be completed, greater facilities for the rapid communication with the seaboard and the great western lakes, and for the speedy concentration from thence of a military force at any point of attack, than is possessed by any other place on this frontier. But beside these advantages, and the greater means which exist here for the cheap sustenance of an army, the Genesee valley canal, which is already constructed and in operation for the distance of about fifty miles, and is designed, when completed, to connect this city with the Allegany river, opening thereby to our city an extensive timber country, from whence timber for shipbuilding and repairs can very easily and cheaply be obtained, together with the facilities which our vast water power presents for the construction of such military weapons and implements of war as require the use of water power or machinery, give to this place an importance as a military and naval depot possessed, as your memorialists believe, by no other place in this State. On this point your memorialists beg leave to refer to the report of Col. Abert, the head of the Engineer department, made to Congress in July, 1843, in further confirmation of their views.

In view of these facts, your memorialists respectfully pray that Congress, at its present session, make provision, by suitable appropriations and otherwise, for the immediate fortification of the port of Rochester, and for storing at this point military supplies, and stationing here such a force as shall be at all times sufficient to put an enemy in check, and form a nucleus around which our citizens might rally, in case we should ever be visited by an invading foe.

And your memorialists will ever pray, &c.

WILLIAM PITKIN,

Mayor of the city of Rochester.

CHAUNCEY NASH,

Clerk of the city of Rochester.

[L. S.]